

Tuesday, February 6th, 2007

**War Resolutions:** I normally write you at the end of the week to tell you what happened in the prior seven days, but this week I am writing you at the beginning of the week. That's because this week will contain much debate in the Senate, and perhaps some in the House, about the various Iraq war resolutions being offered. There are at least five such resolutions being offered in one house or the other that contain a spectrum of opinions on how the war should be prosecuted from this point forward. Why am I writing to tell you about them before they even come up for a vote?

Because none of them will lead to any policy changes, these resolutions do not have the force of law. They have no substance and would not cause anything to actually happen. They are basically an expression of the opinion of Congress. Expressing such an opinion may have some value in countries where their legislative bodies only have the power to make suggestions. But Congress is not powerless relative to the Iraq war.

There are at least two votes that will actually dictate policy direction in Iraq, rather than just make a political statement. One of these votes has already occurred. Ten days ago, the United States Senate voted unanimously to confirm General George Petraeus to be the commander of our forces in the Middle East. General Petraeus is basically the architect of the new strategy for and reinforcements in Iraq, and he was confirmed without a single "no" vote from any Senator.

The second vote will occur sometime in the next thirty days when Congress receives a request from President Bush for approximately \$100 billion in "supplemental" spending to continue prosecution of military activities in Iraq and Afghanistan. If these funds are not appropriated, the military will be unable to execute their strategy and be forced to leave Iraq.

So take the votes on the non-binding resolutions with a grain of salt, but watch carefully how members vote on the confirmation and the money. If a Senator votes for the General (as they all did) and for the money, they are supporting the new strategy for the war even if they say they are against it.

What is also interesting is that none of these proposed resolutions offer a plan. They just offer varying agreement or disagreement with the president's strategy. Why not offer their own plan for winning? Perhaps they don't have a plan at all; they just want to be critical of someone else.

Rather than debate these non-binding resolutions, we should be discussing what we are going to do after the so-called "surge." If the surge is unsuccessful, what then? Even if the reinforcements are successful (however you want to define success); we will be unlikely to be in a position to just withdraw. We should be talking about a long term strategy to protect our national security in the region with the least military exposure. Our concern is and should be not just about Iraq and Iran, but also the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan; the problems with Syria and Lebanon and threats to Jordan, Israel and others. This is a complex and long term problem with huge implications for our safety and security as a people and a nation.

**Minimum Wage:** At the end of last week the Senate passed a bill to increase the minimum wage that also included a little over \$8 billion in small business tax cuts. The proposal received overwhelming bipartisan support and passed by a vote of 94-3. The House passed its own minimum wage increase bill last month, but it did not contain any tax cuts. A bill that contained tax cuts with the minimum wage increase is something House Democrats opposed last year and something they refused to put into this year's bill. This will make for interesting negotiations between the two bodies.

Until next week, I remain respectfully,

Congressman John Campbell